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Carolyn Gage Calloway
2020

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Take me in, I am no one

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Take me in, I am no one

by

Carolyn Gage Calloway

Report

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to my loving parents, Karin and Bond Calloway. Thank you for your support. I also want to thank the many professors and mentors who have supported me along the way. Shout out to Mark Callahan.

“I tried so hard.”

Linkin Park, *In the End*

Abstract

Take me in, I am no one.

Carolyn Gage Calloway, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2020

Supervisor: Teresa Hubbard

Abstract: My practice is centered around poetry, installation, sculpture, printmaking, computer programming, and time-based media. My multimedia installations allow for moments of self-reflection, mirroring the feeling of physical disassociation and social detachment we experience online. Having both a dark sensibility and a subtly humorous sincerity, my kinetic sculptures, print, and time-based installations remove common objects, language, sounds, and symbols (i.e. traffic signs, building material, furniture, commercial prints, and technology) from their traditional contexts. This allows viewers to reconsider the ways these elements affect their emotional landscape, speaking directly to the disconnect between the mind and the body.

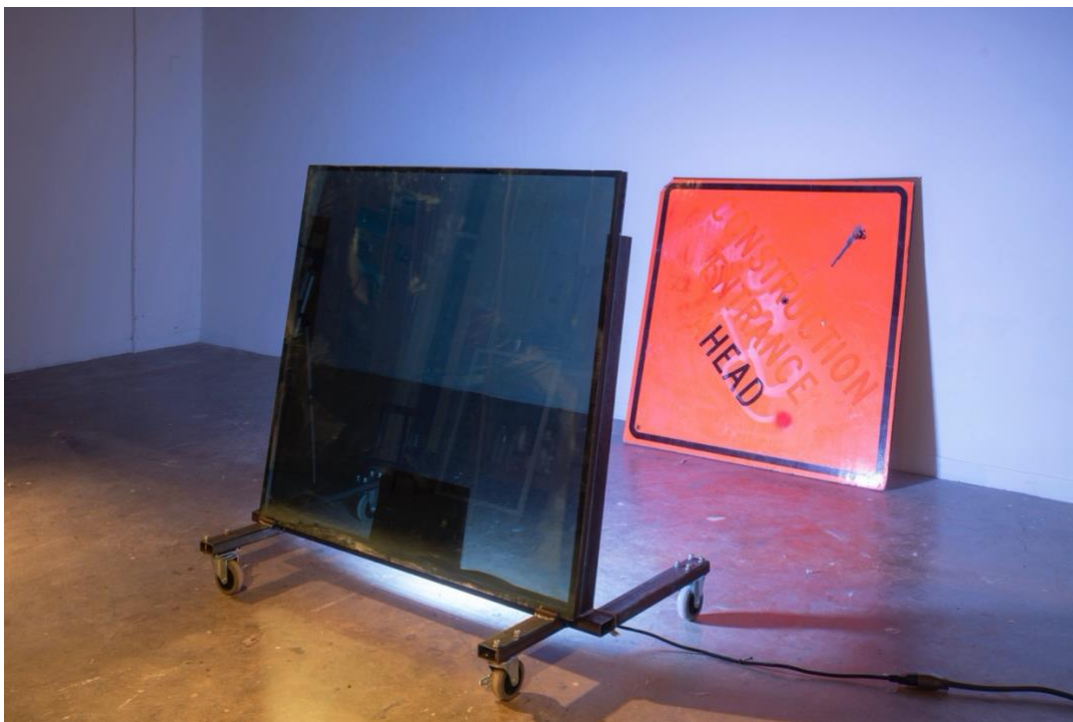
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Take me in, I am no one.



*Figure 1: CC Calloway, "HEAD", two-way reciprocal mirror, time manipulated flood light (6 seconds on, 6 seconds off),
altered found object (road sign), steel, 2019*

Faith is belief without question, a concept I feel closely tied to, and yet removed from. I'm working through this from an autobiographical lens. My religious background is Methodist. This comes with Christian contemporary worship services that involve big productions, large audiences, and live music. Where belief is a public performance. In my hometown of Augusta, Georgia, church is a place to be seen. If you choose to not attend, you will face judgement from the community. Many show up just to "make face." I'm no longer religious today, but it's an upbringing I feel one cannot fully leave behind.

Faith is both easy and difficult. It's something I never truly felt in a religious context or at least not in the same way others did. But it's also something that seems necessary to survive and I'm not talking about faith in God here. To live I must have faith that I am strong enough to continue.

For the past two years, I've been thinking about an irony in my childhood, in terms of my lack of faith in God and, later, my blind faith and adoption of the iPhone in adolescence. The way I see it, faith in the Bible is faith in the past; faith in technology is faith in the future. There's an ever-present duality that's always playing out in front of me. In politics, in media, in the history of art. It's a clash between the old and the new, time battling with itself. I battle with time in my practice and I battle myself; in identity, image, narrative, and poetics.

The main genre I classify my work within is autobiography. Before I begin to define how autobiography works in my practice, I want to address one truth. I am a millennial white woman living in America. I want to be open about my privilege and the fact that my experience of being human is one that is unique to me. I am not trying to pretend I am anyone else. I do not believe that the issues I raise in my practice are always universal. That said, I feel it is important to tell my story, and my goal is for the way I characterize myself in my work to be multifaceted enough that any viewer can find an entry point. Whether that be insight on a perspective that is

unfamiliar to their own or a site for their own self-projection, my work involves empathy, humility, satire, self-criticism, and sociological research. My work oscillates between specificity and universality. The only subjects I consider to be universal are aging and the idea of emotional hurdles. “Universal” is tough to argue for in any other realm.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons I have always been interested in what everyone else is doing, what they’re thinking about, how they’re feeling. Looking into the lives of others has always made me feel less alienated. This is why I have always sought out perspectives outside my own to find answers to life’s most difficult questions. Construction of identity through digital platforms is fascinating to me. I grew up in the first generation to have access to the internet since birth. I was a pre-teen when Facebook was invented. Digital identity has always been a concept in the forefront of my mind, something that always needs perfecting.

I am very thankful for those who share their inner world with the public. Even if their experience is wildly different from mine, there is always something I can take from listening to others, tools that help me encourage a desire to be alive and to keep living. This desire in particular has always been a challenge for me to maintain. I do not want to be a victim; I just want to be as open as possible about human experience. Throughout my life I have struggled with depression, suicidal thoughts, and perfectionism. I have always felt a shred of guilt for being sad, due to my somewhat privileged upbringing and family support. There are many questions I am seeking to find answers to about why this is and where it comes from. That in itself is also a reason I continue to mine my personal history within my practice. Working through the often-dark cavities of my interior world and encapsulating that struggle in a piece of art or poem, helps me place this looming energy somewhere positive. It takes the weight off of thinking and gives it a spot to rest. It also helps me see what the feeling really *is*.

When I was a child, thinking of myself as a “dumb kid,” art was the most natural language I could speak. It was the only talent I had that was acknowledged by others, so I made it my identity. My art practice, like many others before me, had its origins in painting and drawing of the human figure. I spent most of my time in the beginning drawing portraits of people who I wanted to learn more about. It was a sort of trade. The art I made in my teenage years was an entry point into uncovering the veil of mystery in others. I treated it like a paid interview, the payment being the portrait. Drawing was simply a means to access people I could not have otherwise.

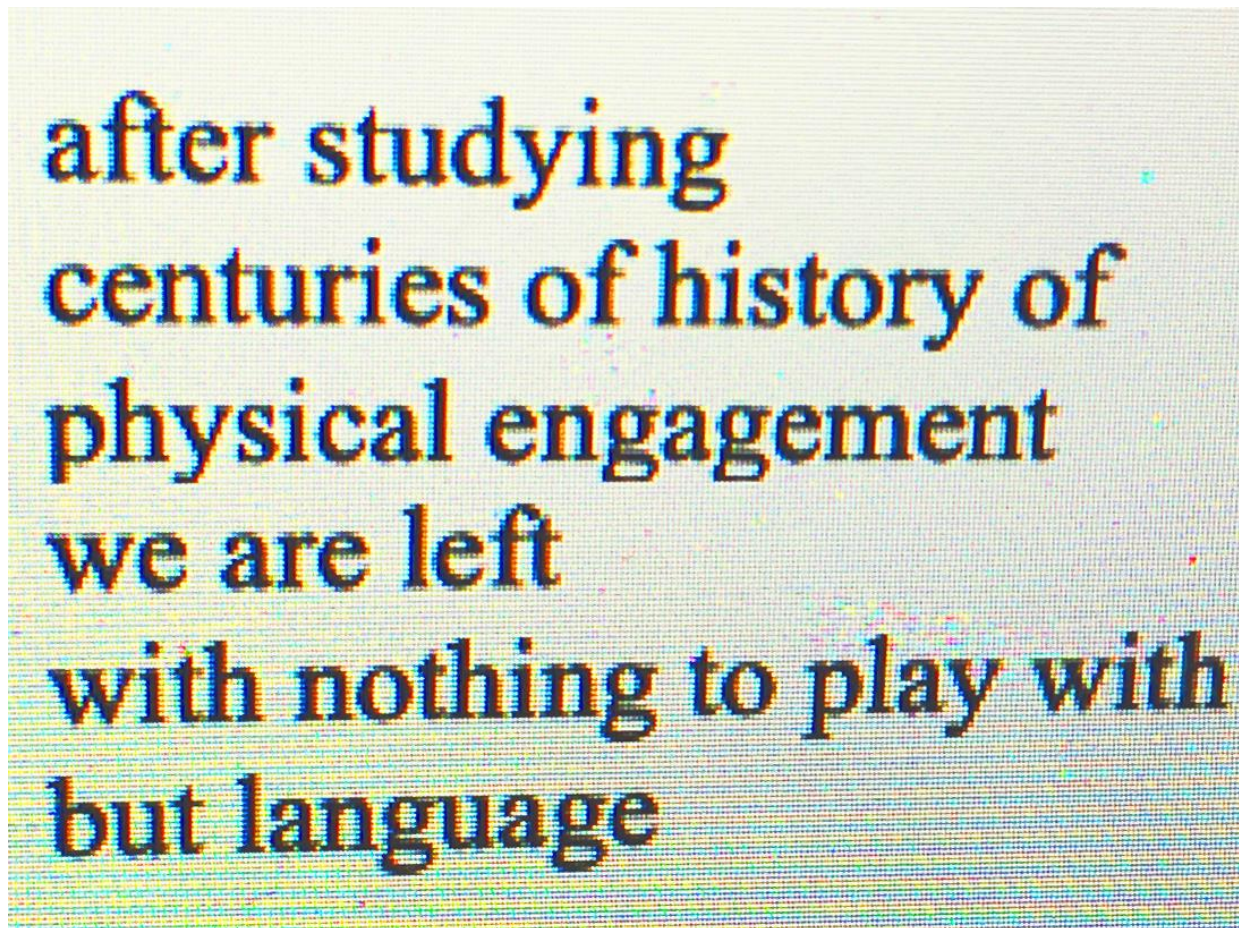


Figure 2: CC Calloway, Screenshot, July 2018

Eventually my interest in portraiture and painting dwindled. A switch took place in my twenties while in art school when I became more interested in non-fiction and talking about reality in my creative practice. Trying to define “reality” through the experiences of others translates as inauthentic. There are so many versions of “real,” and you only really know your own. I find that the only way to talk about reality is to communicate experience through my own perspective. After this shift happened, I quit drawing, started writing, working in photography, found-object installation, sculpture, and video. Exploring such a large, all-encompassing subject as reality requires many tools. Reality itself is filled with so many objects. In this sense, material is endless.

life is easy

love is hard

u r planked

leaning on a wall

so many things

you should carry a bag

My use of media is always a conscious decision. When photography falls flat, language helps complete the circle. When words and images cannot express the feelings of the mind within a body relating to the world around it, sculpture can provide that intimacy and relationship to a viewer. When there is no room for objects, you can pack everything into a video or a book. I like to work with found material. I’m interested in material that has a life, a history, and a function. I like take objects and content from reality and very subtly change them, stretching

their meaning while still referencing their historical contexts and origins. Consider it “*reality*” *with a twist*.

The media that is the most effective and natural tool for me is the written word, with image following as a close second. Growing up in the new millennium during the dawn of social media, I have been documenting my life in images since childhood. Switching my diary from the traditional format to a Word Document and a Twitter account allowed for endless storage of personal history. The time stamps and geotags of digital entries allow me to know exactly where and when I felt what I did. This freedom provided by digital space resulted in a life-long archive that allows me to see and re-see myself over and over again, with my perspective shifting as I age. I consider this reevaluation; it is a process of growth. The build-up of all this material results in an endless loop of self-reflection and reuse of past language to describe present conditions.

Because reality is so multifaceted in itself, it is impossible to speak to every subject. I have to narrow it down to accurately communicate all that takes place in my practice, stating what my work is and what it isn’t. This paper is organized by a list of self-made “rules” and “lessons” to help describe further the underlying themes of my work, my motivations, influences, and the conscious decisions I make in the process of generating art.



Figure 3: CC Calloway, PURPOSE FOUL, embroidery on denim, spotlight, 2020



Figure 4: CC Calloway, PURPOSE FOUL, embroidery on denim, spotlight, 2020

1. *Speak from the heart and speak slowly*

“Debt to childhood is one we never pay off”

- Francis Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time: Can Thought Go on Without a Body?*



Figure 5: CC Calloway, *WHO REMEMBERS PLACES*, Risograph, 15"x11", 2020

My mother was a journalist with 7 different jobs at any given moment. Like many American women in the late 1990s and early 2000s, every day after she drove us home from school, she watched the Oprah Winfrey show. I am aware that Oprah at this current moment is a quite controversial character due to her billionaire status and callouts of dead black male celebrities. I have no interest in identifying with her recent behavior and feel there is not enough information presented by the media to comment. That said, running 25 years with her final season finishing when I was 17, as a child I really *heard* Oprah, and what she said on her television show stuck with me. I consider Oprah to be one of my most valuable teachers because she taught me to love literature before I even knew how to read.

Struggling with learning disabilities, I was not able to fully read until the age of 11. Being so far behind my peers at a very academically rigorous private school, I continued to spend life up until age 21 thinking of myself as a “stupid girl”. This is a name I still call myself often and am trying to leave behind. But, like stated previously by Francis Lyotard, *debt to childhood is one we never pay off*. This prior mentality and residue it left behind has a huge impact on the work I make today.

At age 20, I finally read a book from Oprah’s Reading List, one by her close friend and one of the most cherished and prolific authors that has ever been alive during my lifetime, Maya Angelou. Her novel and autobiography of her early years of her life, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings was the first example that led me to believe that telling your story could be a selfless, world-changing, rebellious, and heroic act. The most consciously considered themes of Angelou’s entire body of work are the refusal of the human spirit to be hardened, the persistence of innocence against overwhelming obstacles, and survival. (Weller, S. (1973). Personal Interview.)

This novel is often referred to as an autobiographical fiction because Angelou uses tools of thematic development and other techniques common to fiction. She takes autobiography as a genre and attempts to change and expand its boundaries. She and I had very different, one could even say opposite childhood experiences. She grew up African American pre-Civil Rights Era when the South was segregated, and racism was common. Although we were raised in the same region, within the same religion, her experience is incredibly different from my privileged and white experience of growing up in the South in the new millennium.

History was taught to me in school. That said, during my primary education, history was never told to me from a female perspective. There have always been autobiographies, but the ones I was required to read in school were all only by white men and they were totally boring.

All of which were stories I already knew the endings to, just mediated differently in each iteration. As personal and specific as Angelou's experience was, her voice and story moved me, continually shifting my outlook on life, self-worth, and empathy. Her work has impacted women of multiple generations all over the world. She has spoken up for victims of racism, violence, child abuse, and sexual assault. In her case, the personal became universal. Written at age forty-one, Maya Angelou had to throw herself into her memory, reliving trauma. Her act of selflessness paved the way for many to speak honestly about their personal experience. She spoke about issues never spoken about before. Her telling her truth was a gift to the world. We would not be where we are today without her.

BACK TO THE FLOOR WHERE YOU LEARNED TO LOVE THE CEILING

- **Construction of Identity: Fiction is the control; reality is the constant**

My interest in Mike Kelley started when I heard about his death in high school. I saw headlines that said "*ARTIST*" and "*SUICIDE*" and I clicked and consumed. In a way his death made me feel like we had something in common, sad kids raised in a suburban wasteland, placing our eminent doom into a shirt pocket. As time goes on, I find that I relate to his work more every day. He presses at education, his Catholic background, and the boredom of everyday blue-collar American life, pushing up against it and making a character of himself. The character he embraced was one that was pushed onto him by viewers and critics. Its basis in reality is intentionally vague. In interviews he'll say that his work is purely a response to what people place onto it. I do not really buy that, and I like the fact that I will never know where Mike Kelley drew the line between reality and fiction.

His and Maya Angelou's work delve into similar layers of personal history mixed with fiction. His is, for the most part, purely satirical, a sort of a nod at humility without actually

being humble. On the other hand, Angelou's work is gravely serious. I find that they are somewhat opposing figures for many reasons. Kelley, a white man, who made jokes about his identity and Angelou, a black woman, embracing her personal story, revealing her trauma, releasing it purely (only slightly tinged with fiction) for the benefit of others. Maya Angelou's work I would argue changed the world, Mike Kelley on the other hand, made a joke of the world. I thought it would be interesting to bring them together for a conversation. Unfortunately, they are both dead, so this interview is entirely fictional, sourced from an array of interviews from the past.

Q:
Starting with you Mike, I read previously that you first aspired to be a novelist before becoming an artist.

MK:
Yes, this is true. I chose to become an artist because I wanted to become a failure. That's what people did back then.

Q:
Did your parents encourage you to read growing up?

MK:
I was a book worm of my own volition. My parents were very working class. Reading to them was a waste of time.

Q:
So, what encouraged you to read?

MK:
I was a wuss.

Q:
What about you Maya, or do you prefer Dr. Angelou? What led you to write?

MA:
Dr. Angelou is what my friends call me. The library saved my life.

Q:
How so?

MA:

When it looked like the sun would not shine anymore,
God put a rainbow in the clouds.

In the 19th century, some African American lyricist, a poet — probably a woman, I don't know — said, "No. God didn't just put the rainbow in the sky." We know that rainbows, suns, moons, stars — all sorts of illuminations — are always in the firmament, but clouds can so lower and lour so that the viewer cannot see the light. So, God put the rainbow in the clouds themselves — in the worst of times, in the meanest of times, in the dreariest of times — so that at all times the viewer can see a possibility of hope.

That's what a library is.

MK:

Maybe in a sense I read so much to separate myself from my boring life. The library saved me too; from having to think about myself.

Q:

How does your work relate to faith? As artists who depend largely on autobiography, the dare must be painful.

MA:

What I'm interested in is *survival*, but not just bare, awful, plodding survival. Survival with some *style*, with faith. Yes. The dare is quite painful. It's a question of probing yourself so deeply and then admitting what you find. You reexamine all the trusts betrayed. Writing this sort of thing is painful, but ... I do like myself. I like the fact that I take responsibility for being human- which is, to me, a grave responsibility.

MK:

I was raised Catholic, but I don't have faith. My only control over this perhaps fatalistic worldview is through the overt construction of it as fiction; that's my only power.

Q:

How close is your work to reality? How much are you giving away?

MK:

I'm not admitting to anything. My work is a response to the narratives that are placed onto it by others, not by my personal narrative. Despite the fact that my biography might be fabricated, it's not ahistorical. All the terms for understanding my work come from specific historical lineages.

Q:

In some of your previous statements, work, and writing you appear to be identifying yourself as a working-class guy or...

MK:

...being abused by my father, or finding myself in a bad school, or any common scenario that could “explain” my artistic motivations narratively. The work then takes this fabrication as its ostensible subject, yet its true meaning comes from how things don’t add up. Its manner of construction is much more telling than the narratives, because they are simply a pack of conventions.

Q:

Dr. Angelou, how much of your autobiography is fiction?

MA:

Each character is very clearly constructed by my memory. I used tools from literary fiction to shift its flow to that of a novel. It is my story and I am speaking my truth, a truth that had never been told in writing before. The Black American female has nursed a nation of strangers- literally. And has remained compassionate. This, to me, is survival. She is strong. And she is inclusive, as opposed to exclusive. She has included all the rest of humanity in her life and has often been excluded from their lives.

MK:

Am I that stranger?

MA:

You decide.

2. Try being in the moment of your reaction.

Sometimes I feel well-adjusted. Later, I read something that tells me no one is well-adjusted. To make it simple, the product of my practice is just documentation of someone attempting to be “well-adjusted.” Looking at yourself so thoroughly hurts, looking at everyone else hurts too. Like Mike Kelley said, it is all just a pack of conventions. I think this is true in all forms of storytelling, reality and fiction. Just like the printing methods I utilize to mediate images in my work, the narrative I present is always in question. I cannot completely give myself away in the means Angelou did, or at least not in this moment. That said, it is something to build toward. The following poem is an example of that:

*I LOVE
ME
(IN
ADVA-
NCE)*

CC CALLOWAY

Hey

I love me (in advance)

future tense cc is practical as fuk

what do you do
to remove pressure

should I lift weights

do I need to have like
strong muscles
in order to dance
choreographically
with a group of other people

umm
how do I understand what
other people are thinking about

when I look them in the eye does
that mean we're sharing something?

am I supposed to touch them when they feel bad
how do you know who wants to be touched
?

silence

how do I know whether or not to wear
a spaghetti strap
or a turtleneck

or if my pants are too much

is it okay to show midriff
is it okay
to try to understand how boys feel
or how girls feel
or how someone other than you feels

**breathes*

do you need everything

is it okay to wonder what my friends now
will be later
**breathes*

I used to think people who cared less
were better than me
and then I became I businessman
and a cowboy

THIS IS SCRIPTED
IT'S ALL FUCKIN' SCRIPTED
JUST BECAUSE I OWN THE BOOKS DOESN'T
MEAN I READ THEM
I SHOULDN'T TRY TO HELP YOU
FINISH A SENTENCE
TAKING YOUR VIRGINITY
SMOKING A JUUL MADE ME A BAD PERSON

I REGRET EVERY WEEK
I DON'T TALK TO A STRANGER

FADE RESISTANT

GOT DARK THINGS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE

TEMPORARILY POSSESSED BY TEXAS
ALL THE WAYS I KNOW HOW TO LIGHT A MATCH
LOTS OF THOUGHTS
NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR

DEAR GOD, IT'S ME CC
DEAR GOD, IT'S ME CC
DEAR GOD
IT'S ME, CC

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF IGNORING EVERYTHING

GETTING IN TUNE
WITH MY
BASIC BITCH
TENDENCIES
YOU SHOULD CALL ME
LONG-GAME-LACEY !

I IDENTIFY AS A SOUTHERN FEMALE
WITH BURNT EDGES

IT'S WEDNESDAY IN ATLANTA
IT'S ALSO WEDNESDAY IN TEXAS
SOUTHERN MOTHER

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU GOT SAVED

LOOK AT THE FABRIC
AND SEE YOUR FACE
WE ARE CLOTHING
YOUR WHOLE CLOSET IS
ON THE FLOOR

***LOOK AT YOUR
WATCH NOW***

I FORGET SOMETIMES THAT I KNOW
EXACTLY HOW TO LIVE MY LIFE

TAKE A CHANCE, HOE
BITCH, PLEASE BURN MY TONGUE

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

A SLICE OF LIFE
A SLICE OF LIFE

ARGUE ABOUT THE FUTURE

FREE TO FALL

WOKE UP WITH A SOCK COVERING YOUR EYES UNDER A WEIGHTED BLANKET

U HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE
WORKING WITH

*YOUR DAD USED TO TELL YOU TO GET MARRIED AND
NOW HE THINKS YOU SHOULD STAY SINGLE*

YOUR MOTHER CRIES OVER HAIR SUGGESTIONS

*YOUR GRANDMOTHER IS A SAINT WHO TELLS YOUR MOTHER
SHE PREFERS
HER HAIRSTYLE
WHEN SHE HAS BANGS*

**NOT FOR LOVE OR MONEY
IM NOT SACRIFICING ANYTHING**

WHAT DO YOU FEEL LIKE
THINGS FALL OVER
ARTIFICIAL HEART
THE AGING HEART
IF YOU REMEMBER
I'LL REMEMBER

TENDER NOD TO THE UNKNOWN

OOP STILL DEATH OF FLATLINE
I WANT MY HAIR... MY HEART TO LEAVE THE SOLAR SYSTEM

SOME LONGINGS SURVIVE DEATH

AS CLOSE TO ETERNAL AS WE MAY EVER REALIZE

All to cease to be or to be forgotten

A HARSH TRUTH: TO FILL OR BREAK

ITALLBOILSDOWNTOVULNERABILITY

*MAKE THE WOMAN VULNERABLE
AND YOU'LL MAKE HER INNOCENT
TAKE AWAY HER POWER
AND SHE BECOMES
THE PERFECT PIECE OF ART*

**WE ARE ALL
WE ARE THERE
WHILE SHE SEARCHES FOR GOD
PURE FLESH AND SPECTACLE
ALL WE HAVE IS PROJECTION**

CREATED BY GOD
TO DO SOMETHING SPECIAL

***CAPITAL SEEKER AND
CAPTIAL ITSELF***

THE COST OF ACHIEVEMENT

***FOR THERE IS NO HOLY RESPITE WAITING
AS THIN AS PAPER TRASH***

THESE PASSENGERS
BENDING UNDER THE WILL OF MANY

**DRESS YOURSELF IN ISOLATION
THE DESTINATION IS THE SELF**

Looking for a career path for digitally oriented personalities

**NEVER GREW UP OR THREW UP
SEX LOVE AND DEVOTION
INTEGRITY NOT ISOLATION
AWARE INSTEAD OF THE VOUYERISTIC**

**WE NEED TO BE LISTENERS
INSTEAD OF TALKERS
WE NEED TO BE PATIENT
TO BE HOPEFUL**

CLEAN YOUR PLATE

NEED PERMISSION TO FEEL OKAY

ASKING

RECIEVEING

THINKING

<3 CC CALLOWAY

Mediation of language and construction of identity are central subjects in my practice. This interest began online in 2007, when I created my first social media account. Twitter was hardly political at the time; most had no use for it. Throughout adolescence I thought of this account as an anonymous diary. Overtime it grew into an extremely detailed archive organized by date and time, charting my personal history and influences. With Twitter's pre-set limitations on character count, the archive reads somewhat like an epic poem. By collecting this material and re-evaluating it through layers of distance created over time, my archive practice serves as a routine of self-evaluation. Acknowledging from a detached perspective the shifts in my self-image and influences, I am able to see a bigger picture. In 2015, I archived my tweets and read them in full for the first time. It became clear then that my life online was a creative practice of its own.

With this discovery, I began to develop a more serious writing practice, focused but not limited to poetry. By placing disparate source material together, all of this thinking amalgamates into one narrative. Solid documentation of my journey. The poem above is an example the outcome of my self-reflective writing practice. Every line was written in a span of three weeks, written at a time when I was trapped in a negative routine of self-dismissal. Because I have such a thorough writing practice, I am able to stop before this self-dismissal gets out of hand. In a sense, looking back at myself through an archive continually saves me from allowing myself to go completely downhill. I think of this personal strategy as an act of *falling upwards*.

The title, *I LOVE ME IN ADVANCE* is a reminder to myself in the future, written after the rest of the material. After looking back at the buildup of this text, I realized I was beginning to tread in self-destructive waters. At the time, "I love you," was what I needed to hear. It was especially important that I heard it from me. At that moment, I was in a state where I was unable to actually say it out loud and believe it. To remove that pressure of having to actually accept it, I

wrote it as a message to myself in the future, “in advance”. I told myself ahead of time and made it a permanent gesture by recording it and writing it down.

Something that feels important to address here, in my work I am never not talking about death. I’ll just leave that idea there.

In an effort to make permanent, the delivery of this text takes place in an array of different media. First it began on Twitter. The way a Twitter account reads is backwards, there were no shifts to that order. What this means is that the last line of the poem was the first line written in the poem, and so forth. There was no editing what-so-ever, which until this point, was very uncommon in my practice. In total desperation, while sobbing, I recorded myself reading the tweets out loud and allowed emotion to take over. This recording took place rather impulsively just moments after I realized the narrative buried within the material.

The poem became a PDF. The goal was for the document to read the same way the voice recording sounded, adding emphasis and attitude through stylization and scale of font, utilizing fonts that with embedded cultural meaning to enforce its tonality. This process was also impulsive, developed on a word document in under two hours. The next form is video. I chose to personify myself with a winking-faced balloon (pictured below). This act of self-objectification was the most pathetic gesture of them all. Its purpose is to express how little I take myself seriously, how aware I am of how over dramatic the poem is at times. An attempt to self-ironicize my own psychic anguish. The balloon acts as a mask for a fool, which is exactly what I was when I wrote the poem.



Figure 6: Video Still, "I LOVE ME (IN ADVANCE)," 6 minutes, 25 seconds

When it comes to writing there is a method, but no set of rules about where my text is sourced from. Most of my writing comes straight from me. The text I appropriate I consider to be a *remix*. In Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling, Navas argues for Remix as a form of discourse that affects culture in ways that go beyond the basic recombination of material. It is more than just sampling, an art form of its own. I do not blindly appropriate material and often there is a strategy employed when I chose to sample.

If every individual were the subject of their own research paper, each person would have their own extensive bibliography. The material we read is brought to life every day through our actions, and these subconsciously adopted modes of thought become our own. Every idea we have comes from an outside source in some capacity. Especially now, especially with the accessibility of the internet.

There are many conflicting voices in my head, stripped of their origins; articles, advertisements, the Bible and church sermons that I went to as a child, twitter, social media, etc. My mentality is built from a conglomeration of passing voices, “conventions” Mike Kelley says.

What we read informs the way we feel, and I think this is a cultural phenomenon millennials are not considering enough. With this mass-exposure to information in mind, I seek to understand how much control we actually have over what we take in.

When I appropriate text, I make sure the source is completely taken out of its original context and made new again. I also think deeply about what it means to rip from the particular source before I do it. This consideration is to ensure I avoid misuse, cultural appropriation, or anything that could potentially hurt the original author. I have zero interest in theft, this practice is more about rebirth and drawing attention to the disparate sources we form our individual identity out of. To some, this idea of poetic remix seems inauthentic, or even like plagiarism.

As it turns out, there's a lot of law that backs me on this practice of reuse and remix. With consideration of the standards set by the Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Poetry, I feel validated to continue this practice. The internet really shifted the idea of originality. With the agency of self-publishing and accessibility of "copy/paste", the author is both dead and reborn over and over again in a constant state of renovation. Recently poets have acknowledged that the act of reusing material is something that must be protected to continue the growth of poetry as a whole. For centuries poets have sampled from other sources, even from other poets. This not something original to my practice at all. In fact, this act of poetic appropriation actually has its own term, *flarf*. The term was coined by Kenneth Goldsmith, a notoriously smug poet who has published work that is literally copied and pasted directly from the weather report. He teaches at University of Pennsylvania, and word on the street is he gets along much better with artists than other poets.

Although some of my work is founded in criticism of mass-consumption and construction of virtual identity within contemporary culture, I am interested in creating a dialogue about both

the good and the bad. Accessibility can act as an equalizer. Shared information also has a way of working as shared strength.

Interest in printmaking = interest in abandoned communication technology

Constantly dreaming

Writing a fan fiction about myself

Put a painting on that painting

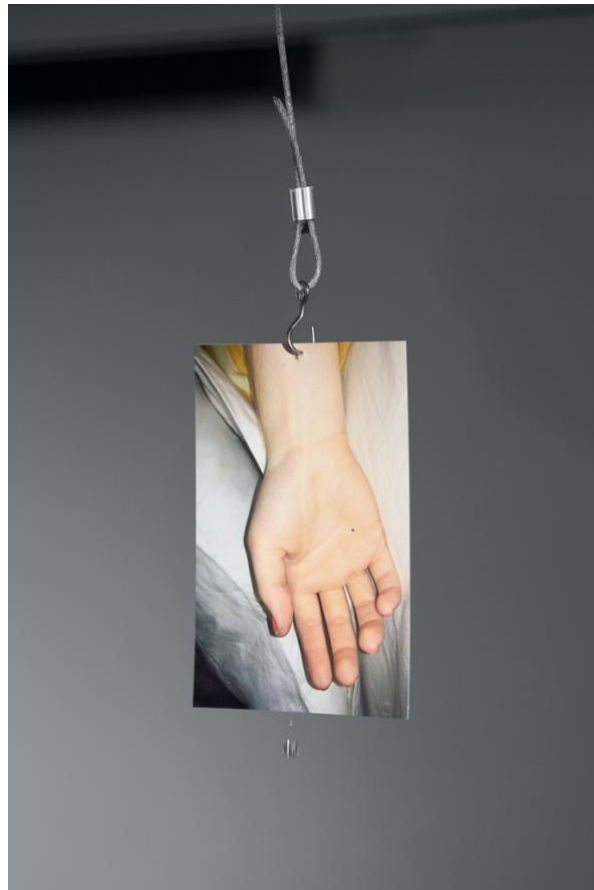


Figure 7: CC Calloway, "a baby and a sponge" inkjet print, water irrigation system (drip), hook, metal wire, sponge. 2018

3. *Have faith, it's gonna be okay.*

My work questions the extent to which we express faith in technology, popular culture, the future, the familiar, the Self, love, and the government. My experience of faith growing up was always confusing. I just didn't feel it the same as others seemed to. I never really believed in God. I was always told he loved me and that was nice, but I could never wrap my head around belief in something I could not see. I have always feared the idea of God as a surveillant. Throughout my thirteen years in primary education, every day on my way to school I passed a sign on the road that said, "GOD IS ALWAYS WATCHING." On the opposite side of that road there was and still is a sign nailed onto a tree groomed to have only two branches to illustrate a cross. The sign said,

***"HAVE COURAGE
JESUS LOVES YOU"***

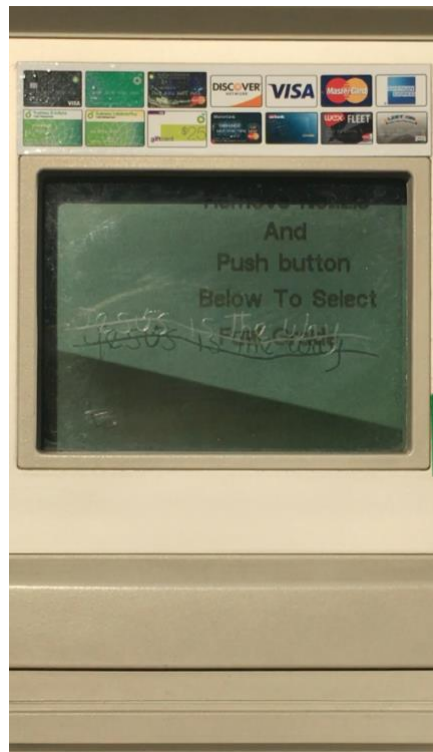


Figure 8: CC Calloway, Video Still from Installation, "In Search of the Real Virgin Mary" 2019

I went to a very small non-denominational private school. Founded in the 1970s as a “white flight” school, its original name was Augusta Country Day School. Eventually the name was changed to Augusta Preparatory Day School. This is the only non-Christian private school in Augusta, Georgia. Regardless of that fact, the school was absolutely not diverse. It was still highly conservative and remains that way today. We were sheltered. With the religious population of the school often having louder voices than others, the environment was very prudish. Slut-shaming was a regular occurrence. People rarely had sex and if they did, everyone knew about it, and it usually resulted in condemnation of the girl involved. Many girls graduated without ever being kissed. Sexuality connected to shame to the point that most people avoided it entirely. Disagreeing with the more religious students at the school often ended with me being told I was going to Hell. I tried very hard to avoid them, but they were ruthless.

When I was in the seventh grade, I went to an all-girl Christian sleepaway camp in North Carolina. Interestingly, this camp is very close to the site of Black Mountain College in North Carolina. We had very religious counselors who often went “off the books,” teaching us life lessons from the gauze of Evangelical extremism. The worst was the lecture they gave us on virginity. This lecture has inspired years of angst, sexual repression, and multiple works of art.

I knew about virginity long before I fully knew what sex actually involved. Envision five twelve- year-old girls in a cabin watching two thirty-something-year old women define what it means to be “pure.” This notion of purity was posed as something we should stride for. They told us that if we had sex before marriage, to our future husband we would have the value of a piece of chewed gum. “And who wants to chew a piece of gum that has already been chewed? It’s best to just keep it tucked away in the wrapper, young ladies.” I was so young at the time that I was not comfortable enough to talk about this with my parents. A year later, my mother decided to have “the talk” with me, you know, the one about “the birds and the bees.” She was deeply

appalled that someone had discussed it with me before and especially in such condemning terms. I was lucky to have parents who did not condemn the act of premarital sex, who taught me about good sexual health practices, but the surrounding population was an entirely different story.

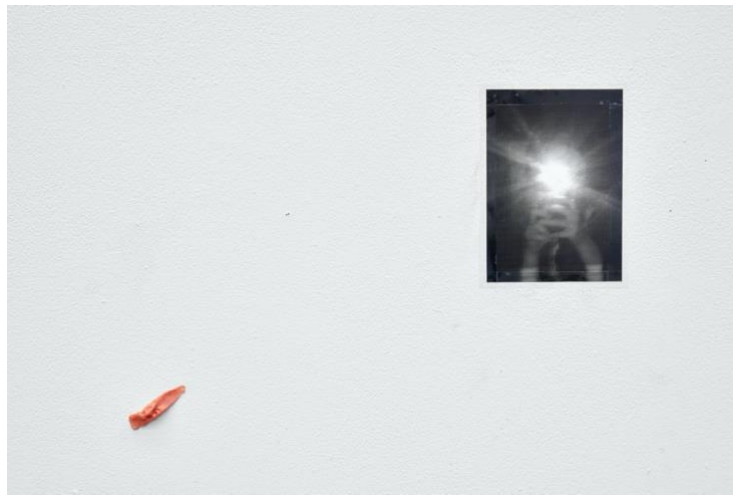


Figure 9: In Search of the Real Virgin Mary, 2019

In this piece, I used gum as a material stuck to a white wall considering it like some kind of Pollock-esque heroic gesture. Taped next to it was a black and white film with an image of a selfie I took through a bathroom mirror. I used the film as a material to convey the reproduction of images and their origin. The film, referred to as a “plate” in older processes of printmaking, is used as a matrix for reproduction. If the original plate exists, you can continue to print endless copies. This sort of digital film is used in offset lithography which is the most common mode of mass reproduction today. Due to the halo effect from the flash, the image resembles traditional depictions of the Virgin Mary, in particular the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Beneath it lies a text saying “HAD A DREAM AND HEARD THAT YOU WERE IN IT.” All the text has a thin layer of white paint over it, emboldening just the words “YOU WERE.” The source of this text, I have not been able to find. That said, I can feel that it is from another source in some way. I assume it was a misheard song lyric. Mis-readings, however tragic, often result in original ideas. Overlapping the text is a video projection. A video taken of text that says, “Jesus is the

way” carved into a gas pump in Atlanta, Georgia. Author unknown. Its asset ratio is the same as the iPhone I took it on, intentionally skewed to make it feel a bit “off.”

When I moved far away my family started sending me many religious texts, I think as a means to help me feel less alone. This was heavy because up until that point I had forgotten about my unresolved questions. One book in particular inspired the text I featured in my installation, *In Search of the Real Virgin Mary*; a children’s book my mother sent me entitled, When I Pray for You. This book simply stated and illustrated all the dreams a Christian mother could have for their daughter.

Although her sending me this book in adulthood was a very sweet gesture, it creeped me out a bit none-the-less. The page that lead me to reconsider my relationship to faith was certainly not the one my mother was focused on. It said basically, that a mother’s greatest dream is for their daughter to carry on the word of Christ and commit to living a life in Jesus’s name. As illustrated in the book, there was so much pressure placed on faith. To summarize the emotional experience of this conflicting thought pattern and guilt for lack of faith was, “HAD A DREAM AND HEARD THAT YOU WERE IN IT.” Having faith and living the life of a Christian was a dream that was forced onto me since birth. It’s a great condition for a “good girl.” It never quite fit right.

I went a long time carrying on with the title of “Atheist.” Throughout the production of this work and research, I have now switched that title to “Agnostic.” I feel I have too many unanswered questions to consider myself anything else. I have no proof or argument that God does not exist. Life has become a little more interesting since I started allowing myself to be comfortable not having the answer to everything. Although it is very rare, sometimes I talk to God. Do I believe He is listening? I don’t really need to know. I understand what comfort belief

provides Christians and ultimately, I identify with the act of seeking comfort. To quote a piece of text I wrote in pencil on the wall of my studio in Fall 2018,

“You like the idea of Heaven because you like the idea that there is something you are reaching for.”

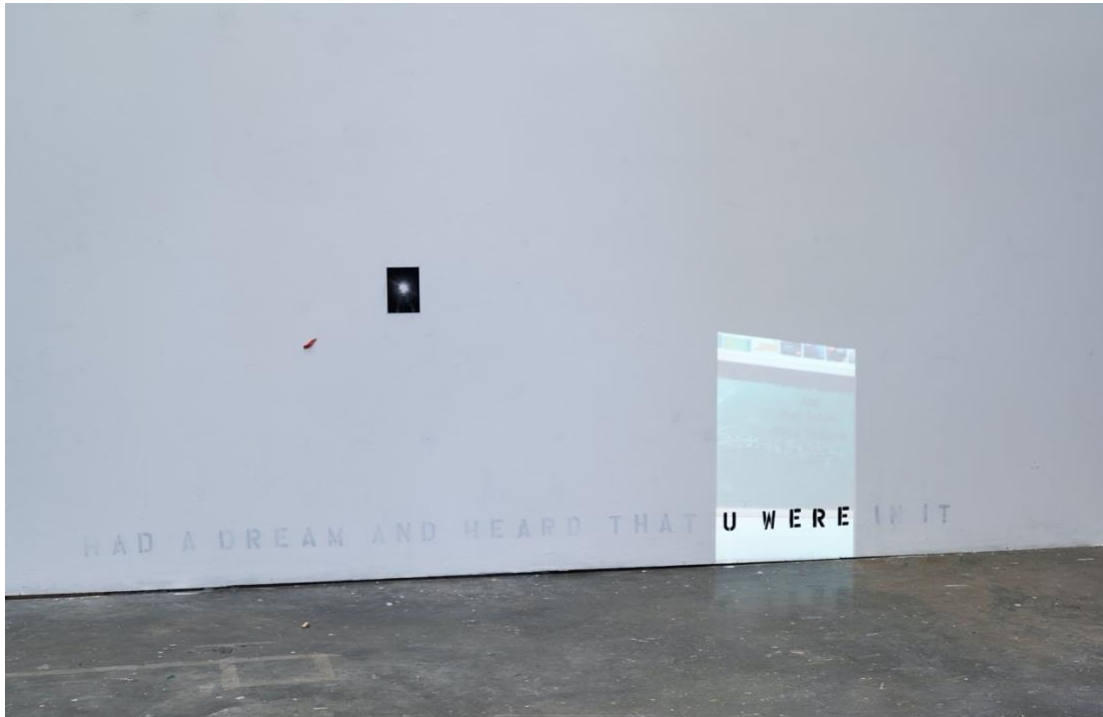


Figure 10: In Search of the Real Virgin Mary. 2019

“God, I dreamed there was an angel who could hear me through the wall.”

-Lyric by Steven Sater, “*The Bitch of Living*” from the musical, *Spring Awakening*.



*Figure 11: CC Calloway, "YOUR SILENT LISTENER" 2018, apple charging cords, aluminum, audio
(plays (I Just) Died in Your Arms by Cutting Crew on repeat through the legs of the chair)*

Growing up, the web symbolized freedom from judgement and a way to see beyond my conservative hometown. Online, you could speak anonymously and find answers to the questions you were too afraid to ask. I made a strong effort in adolescence to think about my faith as little as possible because it made me uncomfortable. During this time, I had a strong anonymous online presence. I spent a lot of time reaching out to an audience filled with “silent listeners,” in a sense feeding off of the faith that someone was reading what I wrote. Matthew 6:5 in the Bible states,

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites

are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and
in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.
Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.”

With this passage in mind that condemns the notion of praying in public, I think about the idea of public prayer in relationship to the gesture of sharing online. How does public mediation shift the authenticity of a feeling and a desire to communicate? How does public dissemination of vulnerability shift its meaning? Upon sharing, a message is unleashed into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance and without the ability for the reader to acknowledge its origin. When a message is left in public space, we are able to remix, vandalize, and give it an entirely new meaning, contextualizing the message within our own voice.

In light of my comparisons between religion and technology, mediation essentially allows us to pull someone else’s gum off the wall and chew it. This idea inspired a video work entitled, *MY LONELINESS IS KILLING ME*.



Figure 12: Video Still, "MY LONELINESS IS KILLING ME" 2019

The use of Britney Spears in this video is a reference to the time of my childhood, the early 2000s. I was five years old when she dropped her first single. My sampling of her music video for ...*Baby One More Time* also has to do with the fact that social media had not been

invented when the song was released. At that time only celebrities were so well documented to the public. Today public vulnerability is something many consent to and desire. Like Andy Warhol predicted long ago, everyone has the ability to be famous for fifteen minutes. We are constantly looking at each other. Britney Spears also had a big impact on my vision of feminine value and fame. She was the first celebrity whose name I knew and my older brother's very first crush. Looking back, the public shaming and non-consensual vulnerability enacted on Britney Spears was very problematic. This generation of female celebrities were made famous by selling sex, in ways that were more direct than previous generations. Some, namely Paris Hilton even self-identifying as a slut. This attitude towards sexuality (at least in my own conscious timeline) came after Britney's single ...*Baby One More Time* I could have used almost any image of a young female pop star from that time, but Britney also had a background that directly related to the message I wanted to send.

The first line of that message lies with Christian Rock. Growing up Methodist, I attended worship services with a band. All the songs they played followed the same format as many pop songs, but instead of using the word "baby" they would say Lord, Jesus, etc. If you remove all the "baby's" from ...*Baby One More Time* it becomes obvious that the song could easily be about Britney trying to reconnect with God, seeking a response. In this case "hit me" meaning "hit me up" or "hmu" as we abbreviate online.

*"I must confess,
that my loneliness
is killing me now
Don't you know I still believe?
That you will be here
And give me a sign*

Hit me, baby, one more time”

Britney is also from the South, and, like many of the people I grew up around, Britney was raised Baptist. Her church in particular was very invested in missionary work. This means Britney grew up believing that her destiny was to carry on the voice of God. She hit superstardom at a young age; when this video was released, she was dating Justin Timberlake and the media coveted her virginity as if “innocence” were her value.

Britney went on to capitalize on her innocence, her whiteness, her body, and then later her shame, her image recycled endlessly, used in different contexts both positive and negative. This leads me to my third message. This one is about the consumption of the female body in media, I chose to illustrate this with the use of chewed gum and a cellphone. After her emotional breakdown, an image of Britney’s vagina taken by paparazzi circulated online. Her innocence was lost and arguably mine too (this was one of the first nude images I saw online.) The world treated her like chewed gum, worthless. Chewing her up, sticking her on a wall, left there to be pulled up and re-chewed time and time again.



Figure 13: CC Calloway, Video Still, MY LONELINESS IS KILLING ME, 2019

4. source from everything

watch it make a circle

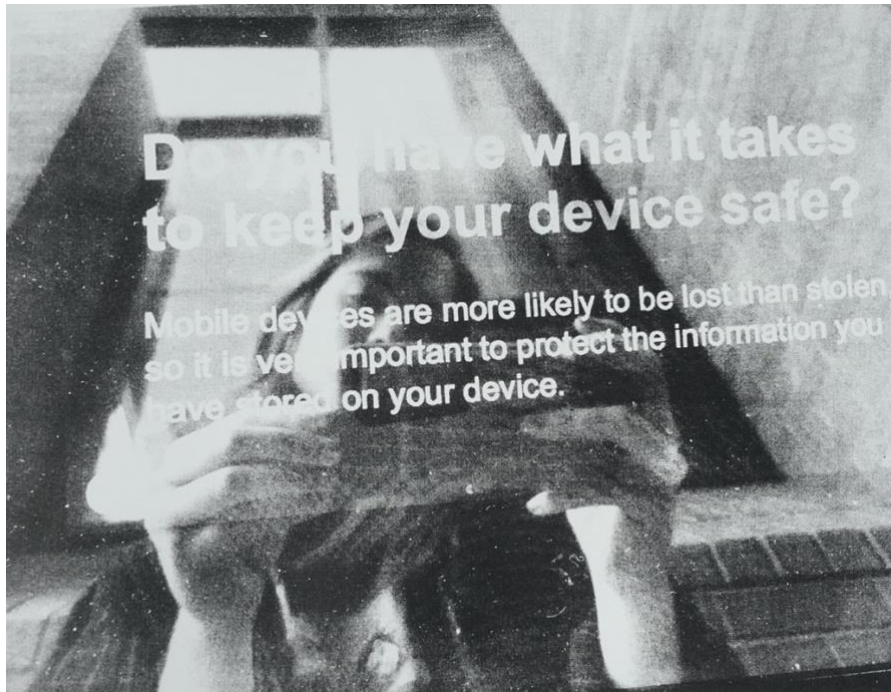


Figure 14: *Me and My Devices*, Lithograph, 11"x 15", 2019

“The artifice in service creates the sensation that there is no artifice”

-Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

My practice in poetry started in 2006. I was twelve years old and in the sixth grade. Twitter had just been invented and celebrities were all getting accounts. A friend and I thought it would be funny to try to talk to them. We had both just reached an age where we were allowed to use the internet freely for the first time (this is not a thing for newer generations who exist with internet access throughout their entire life.) So off we went into the vast ether of the web, waiting endlessly for a response from celebrities.

Twitter has always been difficult to pin down. Who knows exactly what it is for or was meant to be? The limited character count is not attractive to most. Originally the count was

limited to 140 characters, today it is still slim at 280. Limitations online were a new invention, mostly thanks to Facebook's limited design, the championing of apple products, and the rebirth of Minimalist trends in the field of design. If celebrities weren't on Twitter, no one would be.

We never got a response. Later, I made my own account. Although social media is considerably public, I always maintained privacy through subtlety of language, and later I set boundaries on who could view the account. It was, for the most part, completely anonymous. It is so comfortable to express myself on this platform because no one I know can see me. None of my friends even had accounts to begin with, so it truly feels screaming and hearing my own echo on another planet. For the very first time, I could finally say whatever I wanted to no avail. No one was going to read my diary.

I have written loosely with some minor content limitations since then. The main limitation I was served was that my account had to be anonymous, I did not want my parents to read it. A lot of what I tweeted at the start of this were vague references to things that pissed me off or made me sad, song lyrics, things that were challenging me, stuff I read or heard that amazed me, felt out of place, or entirely new. I always liked the idea of my life on Twitter as a practice that I maintain just for myself.

Before I made my account private, the vague style of expression on Twitter started attracting poets to my account. I had never acknowledged what I was doing as a creative practice until then. It was just a diary in my mind. That limited character count, that made no sense to the mainstream population, really hit it hard with the poets. One of my favorite accounts is a bot set to tweet a line from Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* once every hour. For a digital-oriented child like me, web platforms were what made poetry accessible.



Figure 15: Allen Ginsberg, HowlTweeter, 1955, 2020

The genre of Alt Lit was a great influence on my writing practice as well. Usually in the form of blogs or Twitter poetry, writers like Tao Lin, Melissa Broder, and Steve Roggenbuck took to online platforms to get their writing out to the public. Sincerity, or the implication of sincerity, and self-satire are common themes of this genre. Becoming a famous poet, or even a poet at all had never been so easy. Twitter also acted as a community. The poets I grew to love online are easy to reach out to. Some of them I have been friends with for years.

Although it was very much a creative practice, I did not consider poetry's relationship to art until I saw Steve Roggenbuck's solo exhibition at the New Museum. The New Museum displayed videos of him yelling his poems in grassy fields from his YouTube account. It was so simple yet so powerful. Sincerity was his strength. Later, I learned about Fluxus books and Neo-Dada poetry, started acknowledging works of art by Jenny Holzer, Yoko Ono, Ray Johnson, Barbara Kruger. This all led me to realize the power of text in art and that writing is art.

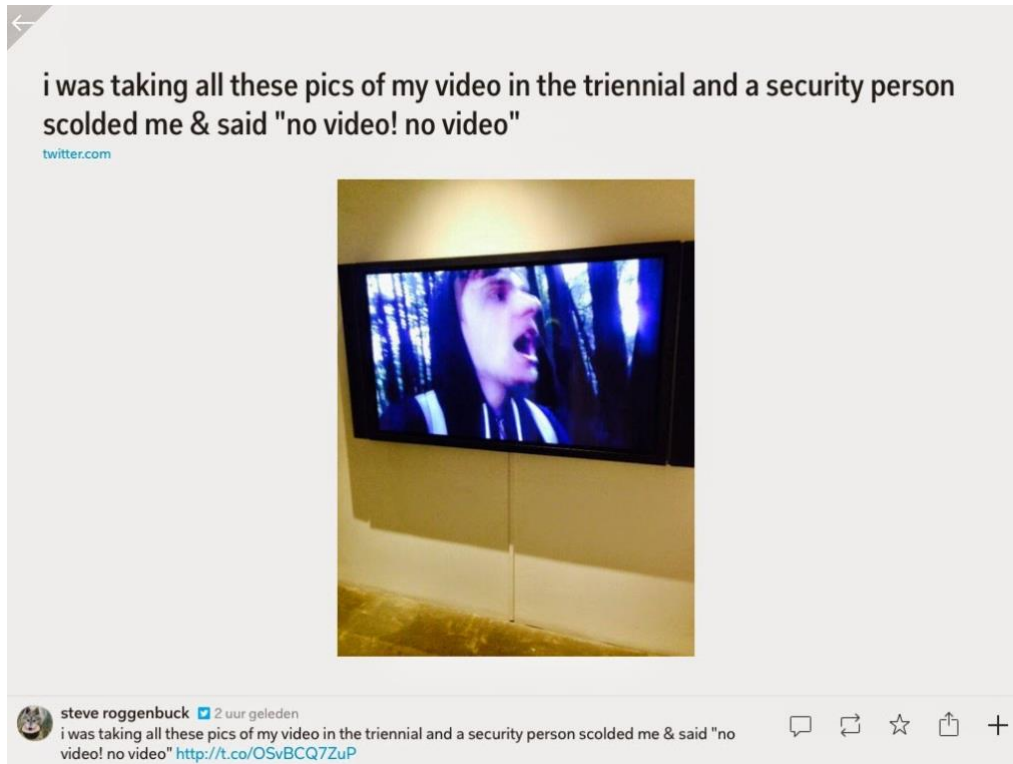


Figure 16: Steve Roggenbuck, Tweet, Image of Exhibition at The New Museum, 2015

My image on twitter has always been just a photograph of my hand. First taken with a tiny digital camera, then a web cam, a flip phone. Then came the invention of the iPhone, with a continually enhancing quality as each new generation of models is born. The image of my hand started as something that felt cute. As I kept updating the image of my hand, through time the act became more meaningful. There was something extraordinary about documenting and tracking time that drew me to Twitter. All the lessons I've ever learned through adolescence and adulthood are written down with a time stamp.



Figure 17: CC Calloway, "FAITH IN 2016", Image taken December 14, 2016. Also featured in installation "a shiner, a shell, n so over u" at Oxbow School of Art, Summer 2019

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